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HB 2067 HD 2 RELATING TO THE PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Statement for
Senate Committees on
Agriculture, Energy, and Ocean Resources
and
Planning and Environment
Public Hearing - March 16, 1988

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HB 2067 HD 2 would amend HRS 188 by adding a new section that would prohibit the taking of live stony coral of the taxonomic order Madreporaria except by permit authorized under HRS Section 187A-6 or 183-41.

Our statement on this bill does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

General Comments

The need for protection of coral resources of the State of Hawaii has been an ongoing and frequent topic of discussion before the legislature. Opponents of regulatory controls have pointed out the potential impacts of such legislation to local coral sales businesses and the difficulty in enforcement of restrictions on taking of local corals due to the import of similar species from out-of-state. Others have questioned the need for any controls. Proponents of legislation restricting the taking of corals have pointed out the paucity of stony corals, particularly the funjiidae, in areas subject to high usage apparently attributable to indiscriminate collection practices. The one major point of agreement by both sides is the recognition that insufficient information on the population biology of

stony corals is available on which to develop rational management practices.

Appropriate resource management, be it timber, water, fish, or coral, can be accomplished only if the nature and characteristics of the resource are known and understood. In the case of stony corals in Hawaii, data on growth rates, mortality, populations and habitat requirements are either lacking, out of date, or so scattered that a comprehensive evaluation of the biology of the order is not presently possible. HRS 187 A-2(6) directs the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to acquire such data in order to provide the basis for informed regulatory decisions. We strongly urge that the DLNR and the University be directed and encouraged, with the necessary funds, to pursue the much needed coral biology studies.

Specific Comments

HB 2067 attempts to meet coral resource management issues inasmuch as it would prohibit taking of stony corals without a permit. However, it would allow commercial taking under the permit provisions of HRS 183-41. By requiring a permit to harvest corals, the DLNR will have a potential regulatory framework on which to compile substantive information on the resource base for more informed management. While we strongly support the compilation of such information, we are concerned that the DLNR may lack the manpower and budget to expand their enforcement practices to encompass additional coral taking responsibilities. If the intent of the legislation is to be achieved, it may be necessary to provide additional funds. We suggest that in addition to the permit procedure, a reporting mechanism be established whereby commercial buyers of stony corals are required to submit copies of purchase orders to a designated office of the DLNR. This would provide baseline fishery (coral) statistics not only on the local harvest but also on the relative proportion of local vs. imported sales.

We further suggest that the DLNR be encouraged to designate certain areas as protected areas from coral harvest in accordance with their resource management responsibilities as provided under HRS 187A-2(3).